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## NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

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### ***NCCOS to Establish Harmful Algal Bloom Forecasting System in Texas***

Texas experiences events known as harmful algal blooms (HABs, or "red tides"), caused by toxic, single-celled organisms called dinoflagellates (*Karenia brevis*). These events can cause fish kills, shellfish bed closures, and respiratory irritation in humans, and advanced warning of HABs would allow coastal managers to take actions to help offset some of these impacts. To address this, the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) is developing a HAB forecasting capability for Texas, similar to that provided for Florida through NOAA's HAB Forecast System. This forecasting system will use data from satellites, in situ sampling and transport models to forecast impacts of *Karenia brevis* blooms on Texas beaches. NCCOS scientists recently presented the proposed system to local state and university scientists in College Station, Texas, in an effort to explain project goals and to identify the needs of local managers. It is estimated that this system will become operational in Fall, 2006. For more information, contact [Richard Stumpf](#) or [Timothy Wynne](#).

### ***GIS Helping in Emergency Decision Making***

At the 2006 National Hurricane Conference, NOAA's Coastal Services Center (CSC) highlighted the benefits and applications of geographic information system (GIS) in emergency decision making. CSC and other conference attendees highlighted tools that emergency managers can use to prepare for, respond to, and recovery from hurricanes, flooding, and other hurricane hazards. In addition to educating attendees on hurricane tools, the conference featured other valuable tools, software, Web applications, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) hurricane lab. For more information on how NOAA is supporting hazard mitigation, contact [William.Brooks@noaa.gov](mailto:William.Brooks@noaa.gov) or [Doug.Marcy@noaa.gov](mailto:Doug.Marcy@noaa.gov).

### ***Keep Your Trash Outta My Splash! Marine Debris Campaign Wins Award***

Shonda Borden of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Extension Program who manages a grant from NOAA's Marine Debris Program, was instrumental in providing guidance in developing the 30-second PSA which features a fish expressing his disgust over marine debris. The PSA was written and directed by John Bell with Clear Channel Radio in Mobile and was aired last Labor Day weekend. It will be aired again during the Memorial Day weekend on several stations along the Alabama and Mississippi Coasts.

"I'm really pleased with how it turned out. John Bell did a terrific job," says Borden, adding that the full effect of the PSA was somewhat dimmed by the landfall of Hurricane Katrina. "During the first flight that ran for two weeks straddling Labor Day Katrina struck," she says. "Who wants to hear a fish talk about marine debris when your front yard has a shrimp boat unexpectedly docked in it? However, there were a lot of people listening to the radio for long stretches at a time, so the message did get out."

The PSA won first place in the most creative Public Service Announcement category from more than 1,500 entries and featured a fish throwing seaweed, mud, dead carcasses, and pond scum at a human much like humans throw various forms of trash in the rivers, bays, and oceans. “Everyone that I talked to that heard it had great things to say about it—that it was funny and gave them a different perspective of marine debris,” says Borden. “There will be a second flight of two weeks straddling Memorial Day, so keep your ears open! The PSA is estimated to be heard by approximately 240,000 people in coastal Alabama and Mississippi 9 to 10 times.” If you do not want to wait till Memorial Day, then you may download the PSA at: <http://www.masgc.org/communications/pubs/marinedebrispsa.mp3>.

## ***NOAA Seeks Comment for the Incidental Harassment of Marine Mammals in the Gulf of Mexico***

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking comment on a request from the Minerals Management Service for the incidental harassment of marine mammals, which may result from the removal of offshore oil production structures in the Gulf of Mexico. During exploration, development, and production operations for offshore oil production, the area of the sea-floor around oil production locations becomes a repository of equipment and structures used in these activities. In compliance with Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act regulations and Minerals Management Service guidelines, lease operators are required to remove sea-floor obstructions within one year of lease termination or after structures have been deemed obsolete or unusable.

There are two primary methodologies used in the Gulf for decommissioning structures; non-explosive and explosive severance. Explosive activities use specialized charges to sever the target. Since the underwater detonation of explosive charges generates high levels of acoustic energy, explosive demolition activities have the potential to cause the incidental harassment of nearby marine mammals and require an authorization from NOAA under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. For this reason, Minerals Management Service has requested on behalf of the oil industry an incidental take authorization from NOAA.

To help protect marine mammals and sea turtles in the vicinity of the activity, the oil industry proposes to use mitigation and monitoring measures prior to detonation activities; including aerial surveys and passive acoustic monitoring for large charges. If a whale, dolphin, or sea turtle is sighted within a designated area (nearly one mile from the removal site for the largest charges), they will postpone the activity until the animal departs the area.

NOAA Fisheries Service has preliminarily determined that these detonation activities will not result in more than a negligible impact on affected marine mammal stocks. It is anticipated that no marine mammals or sea turtles would be seriously injured or killed during these operations. NOAA’s Fisheries Service will accept comments on the application and proposed authorization through May 22, 2006. Comments should be addressed to: Steve Leathery, Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

## ***NOAA Announces Recipients of 2006 Marine Stewardship Awards***

National Award Program Launched to Honor Excellence in Sustainable Use of Ocean Resources

Today NOAA announced the recipients of the first-annual marine Stewardship and Sustainability Awards. This national award program was developed by NOAA Fisheries Service to honor innovation and excellence in marine stewardship by recognizing organizations and individuals who have advanced conservation and sustainable use of U.S. marine resources. "The marine Stewardship and Sustainability Awards demonstrate our appreciation of marine resource stakeholders whose accomplishments have enhanced NOAA's scientific understanding of the oceans and advanced the nation's resource management programs," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator.

The recipients of this year's awards are: Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska; the Pollock Conservation Cooperative of Alaska; Holland America Line of Seattle; Ed Melvin of Washington Sea Grant in Seattle; the Gulf of Mexico Foundation of Corpus Christi, Texas; and SeaShare of Bainbridge Island, Wash. "It is my privilege to recognize these organizations and individuals for fostering broader adoption of a stewardship ethic among marine resource users," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "I'm pleased to acknowledge NOAA's partners for their contributions to fulfilling our stewardship goals."

The recipients of the 2006 Stewardship and Sustainability Awards were selected from 48 nominations for awards in six categories of achievement. For more information about each award category, visit [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ocs/mafac/award\\_description.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ocs/mafac/award_description.htm).

The Gulf of Mexico Foundation has received the Coastal Habitat Restoration Award for its successful development and implementation of 33 coastal habitat restoration projects in five Gulf States. These projects are expected to restore nearly 14,000 acres of valuable coastal habitat that is important for the long-term health of marine resources. The Foundation manages a coastal partnership made up of volunteers who work on habitat restoration projects, fostering civic service, public education, and local ownership in these important coastal resources. The awards will be presented at an awards dinner in Washington, D.C., on June 5.

## ***Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council to Hold Meeting***

The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council will hold a public meeting on April 21, in Houston, Texas. The meeting will be held at 200 N. Dairy Ashford, from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The sanctuary is managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"Sanctuary advisory council members help us balance protection of our coral reef ecosystem with the concerns of the local community," said George P. Schmahl, the sanctuary's manager. "The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council provides the forum to make a difference." All meetings are open to the public, and any persons wishing to comment will be given an opportunity to do so during the public forum period of the meeting. To receive more information, or to request a meeting agenda, please contact the sanctuary's office at 979-846-5942.

Established in 2005, the 11-member Flower Garden Banks Sanctuary Advisory Council consists of eight voting non-governmental members and three non-voting federal government agency members. The advisory council includes representatives from the recreational diving, diving operation, oil and gas

industry, recreational fishing, commercial fishing, research, education and conservation communities. Located in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary includes three separate areas, known as East Flower Garden, West Flower Garden, and Stetson Banks. The sanctuary was designated on January 17, 1992. Stetson Bank was added to the sanctuary in 1996. The Flower Garden and Stetson banks harbor the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States and serve as regional reservoirs of shallow-water reef fishes and invertebrates.

## In the Gulf States

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### ***Restoring Grassbeds – is it for the Birds?***

Dauphin Island Sea Lab Scientists Seek to Restore Robinson Island Grassbeds by Utilizing Sea Birds' "Natural Functions"

Although most people consider bird droppings a nuisance, scientists at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab see them as a rich source of phosphorus, a natural fertilizer for grassbeds which have been destroyed by boat propellers. Over the next couple of months, Sea Lab scientists Dr. Ken Heck and Dr. John Dindo will be setting out bird stakes in an effort to revive scarred grassbeds around the popular recreational spot of Robinson Island in Orange Beach, Alabama. Robinson Island is a favored spot in the summer, with constant boat traffic in its shallow waters. Its underwater shoal grassbeds, however, have been much impacted by propeller damage; and much of the terrestrial vegetation on the island itself was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Drs. Heck and Dindo received a grant from the Gulf of Mexico Program to restore both the dune habitation and the prop-scarred grassbeds of this popular location.

Dune restoration began on Tuesday, April 11, from 10am to 1pm as Dr. Dindo and volunteers from AmeriCorps plant 1,000 sea oats on the beaches of Robinson Island. Over the next two months, Drs. Heck and Dindo will also plant birdstake in the damaged grassbeds, hoping to attract seabirds to use the stakes as a resting area where they can "do their business" and fertilize the shoal grass beneath them.

"Birdstake have proven successful in the Florida Keys," comments Dr. Heck. "We're placing signs in marinas and along the grassbed borders warning boaters against using their motors in the seagrasses. We'll also monitor the effects the bird droppings are having in the propeller scars in the shoalgrass beds. We hope a combination of educational signage, replanting sea oats, and a seemingly endless supply of fertilizer will bring the habitats around Robinson Island back to their peak condition," he concluded.

This collaborative project includes the support of: City of Orange Beach; Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; the Gulf of Mexico Foundation; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

### ***Alabama Bill to Aid Removal of Damaged and Diseased Timber from State-owned Lands***

April 14, 2006

The Alabama House of Representatives has passed a bill that will make it easier for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to sell diseased, damaged or right-of-way timber, and timber around state lakes. Representative Allen Layson, who is a registered forester, sponsored the bill. The Senate is

now considering the bill, which is sponsored by Senators Jim Preuitt and Tommy Ed Roberts. Under the current law, certain timber not exceeding \$500 in value can be sold on a negotiated basis. The new law will increase that amount to \$50,000. This will help expedite the removal of the timber before more of it is damaged. In the case of timber affected by the Southern pine beetle, this is significant because it will keep the damage to a minimum.

Layson has worked tirelessly to get this legislation passed for several years. “I believe that this is an important piece of legislation, which is why I’ve tried so hard to see it passed. It has a direct effect on the beauty of our state parks and other state lands, as well as a monetary effect on the budgets of several state agencies,” he said. Conservation Commissioner Barnett Lawley expressed appreciation to Layson for his efforts. “This bill has been one of our legislative priorities for this year,” he said. “It is important because of the loss that can be associated with this type of timber if it is not removed in a timely manner. I want to thank Representative Layson and the others who have shown support for this legislation.”

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama’s natural resources through five divisions: Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Parks, State Lands, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. To learn more about ADCNR visit [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).

## ***Rookery Bay to Provide Protection for Threatened Bird Species***

--Small portion of southern Key Island to be closed during Least Tern nesting season--

NAPLES –Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), in cooperation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), will close a small portion of the beach on the south end of Key Island during the nesting season for the Least Tern, a migratory bird species. For the fifth consecutive season, approximately 3.5 acres of the shoreline is scheduled to be closed between April 14 and mid-August. “Rookery Bay places great importance on protecting Florida’s wildlife and natural resources,” said Rookery Bay Reserve Director Gary Lytton. “Taking steps to protect the Least Tern during its nesting season on Key Island will increase the likelihood of successful breeding and help preserve this threatened Florida species.” ”

Signs will clearly mark the closed portion of Key Island that has served as a beach nesting habitat for the birds in the past. Least Terns are listed by the FWC as a threatened species in Florida and are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty. Least Terns in the nesting area will be carefully monitored and anyone caught disturbing the nesting birds may be subject to prosecution under state and federal laws. Two other species of beach nesting birds, Wilson’s Plovers and Snowy Plovers, have also been documented using this area as nesting habitat.

Rookery Bay was established 28 years ago as a partnership between the State of Florida and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The reserve is one of 26 research reserves operating across the nation. The Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA) manages Rookery Bay along with 45 other sites that include aquatic preserves, National Estuarine Research Reserves and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. CAMA’s programs and activities are designed to help Floridians better understand and conserve the State’s resources through research, education and preservation. For information about Rookery Bay or Florida’s estuaries, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/). For more about the Friends of Rookery Bay, visit [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org).



## ***FLDEP Launches Website to Promote Green Landscaping***

--Site helps citizens, professionals with Florida-friendly plants and landscaping--

TALLAHASSEE – The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) this week launched an interactive website to provide information about Florida-friendly plants and landscaping. A partnership between DEP, the University of Florida, Florida Yards & Neighborhoods and the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the site helps visitors plan environmentally-friendly yards that reduce the need for fertilizers and pesticides and promote water conservation. "Florida-friendly landscaping safeguard the environment and protect the State's natural resources," said DEP Secretary Colleen M. Castille. "The Florida Yards website allows both citizens and professionals to access information on native plants, plan their own landscaping and explore additional resources to design a Florida-friendly yard."

The site provides basic information of Florida-friendly landscaping, including environmental benefits and guiding principles, and includes a database of native Florida plants. An interactive feature allows visitors to design a Florida-friendly yard using indigenous plants that are best suited for Florida's environment. Also included is a professionals' corner, complete with stories and resources for professional landscaping organizations. Irrigation of lawns and landscaping in Florida represents the single largest use of water from municipal water supplies. This water use has impacted the state's aquifer, which is the source of drinking water and water that supports Florida's springs and other ecosystems. In addition, fertilizers and pesticides used on lawns can impact water quality in lakes, rivers and bays. By using native plants during landscaping, citizens can reduce the amount of fertilizers and pesticides used, conserve water, provide habitat for native wildlife and preserve water quality in Florida waterbodies. For more information, visit the Florida-Friendly Landscaping website at [www.FloridaYards.org](http://www.FloridaYards.org).

## ***Florida Island Town Overrun with Iguanas***

April 14, 2006 — By Brian Skoloff, Associated Press

BOCA GRANDE, Fla. — Death and taxes may be life's only certainties, but for folks in this upscale island town, add iguanas. And another tax. In three decades, the resort community on Florida's Gulf Coast has been overrun by the black, spiny-tailed, nonnative lizards that demolish gardens, nest in attics and weaken beach dunes with burrows. Last month, Lee County commissioners agreed to create a special tax for Boca Grande to cover costs of studying the infestation on the barrier island of Gasparilla, where scientists estimate there are up to 12,000 iguanas on the loose, more than 10 for every year-round resident. The frustration here has led to frenzy. Bonnie McGee keeps a pellet gun by her door ready to take on the slithering enemy.

Kevin Enge, an exotic species expert with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, said he believes the iguana was introduced to Boca Grande in the 1970s by a boat captain who brought a few from Mexico for his kids but released them when they grew too large. Their population exploded because each female iguana can lay up to 75 eggs a year. The reptiles are found in a few other places in Florida, but nowhere in the numbers seen on Gasparilla Island, home to television renovator Bob Vila and a vacation spot for the Bush clan. "There's no way you'll get rid of them all. Once they're established to that extent, it's a lost cause," Enge said.

The county hired Florida Gulf Coast University biologist Jerry Jackson to study the problem. He is worried the lizards aren't just a nuisance, but are destroying native habitat, spreading other invasive species through their droppings and endangering the town in the event of a hurricane. "The majority of their burrows are in the dunes along the beaches," Jackson said. "We're threatening the human population

on Gasparilla Island to the extent that the dunes are in danger of just disappearing with a storm surge." The iguanas feed on the eggs of gopher tortoises, a species of "special concern" that the state says will likely to be bumped up to threatened in a few months as their population declines. The lizards also carry salmonella. "The disease organism alone could be a problem for native species, even for humans," Jackson said. "It's a zoo out there. It's an ecosystem gone crazy." Read the [full story](#).

## ***Florida Completes 100,000 Acre Land Acquisition for Kissimmee River Restoration***

OKEECHOBEE— Florida water managers today celebrated another milestone in the massive restoration of the South Florida ecosystem. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board unanimously approved the purchase of the last parcels of land needed to complete the final phases of the Kissimmee River Restoration Project. The 12,000 acres purchased for \$35.8 million complete the total acquisition of 102,061 acres needed for construction of the project. "As the headwaters of America's Everglades, the Kissimmee watershed is a critical component of South Florida's interconnected ecosystem," said Governor Jeb Bush. "The State is eager to move forward and finish this first-of-its-kind river restoration."

Joined by State Sen. Ken Pruitt, State Rep. Richard Machek, Audubon of Florida Executive Director David Anderson, and current and former District Governing Board members, SFWMD Executive Director Carol Wehle presented a ceremonial land deed to federal partner U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lt. Col. Andrew Goetz. After 11 years of purchasing land, acquisition was 80 percent complete at the end of 2003. In 2004, the SFWMD Governing Board directed staff to acquire the remaining 20 percent – and the most difficult – in just two years.

"Kissimmee River progress continues to set new standards for measuring restoration success," said Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Colleen Castille. "Extensive scientific monitoring indicates positive responses in the restored portion of the river, and we expect continued evidence of recovery as construction begins on the next phase of the project." "Thanks to our talented and dedicated real estate and project staff, we were able to successfully meet the Board's aggressive acquisition schedule," Wehle said. "Overall, the 102,061 acres were acquired at an average of \$3,000 per acre. With escalating land costs, this is also a great fiscal success for the public."

### Project background

Approved by Congress in the 1992 Water Resources Development Act, the \$578 million Kissimmee River Restoration Project is among the largest ecosystem restoration projects in the world, and has been studied worldwide by scientists, engineers and policy makers. The 103-mile Kissimmee River once meandered across a 1-2 mile floodplain until the 1960s when it was "straightened" and channelized into the C-38 canal for flood control purposes. While the project delivered its promise, it also destroyed a floodplain-dependent ecosystem that nurtured threatened and endangered species, and hundreds of other fish and wetland-dependent animals. Ultimately, the waterway was transformed into a straight, deep, oxygen-depleted canal – no longer capable of supporting sport fish species.

### Phase 1 sees significant recovery

Today, the Kissimmee River's rescue is well under way and showing tremendous recovery. In 2001, the first of the four-phase Kissimmee River Restoration project was completed. That work filled in 7.5 miles of the flood control canal and restored flow to about 15 miles of historic river channel and associated floodplain. Over the past four years, the river's floodplain is receiving the life-giving sheet flow of water that is healing the river's floodplain ecosystem. Ten species of shorebirds that disappeared after



channelization have returned to the restored area, including nesting by the black-necked stilt. Life-giving flow has returned to the once-stagnant river run, native vegetation has re-colonized and a greater percentage of sport fish are in river channels.

#### What's next?

The next phase of construction is scheduled to begin in May. It involves backfilling about 2 miles of canal, beginning at the northern end of the Phase 1 project area, as well as reconnecting about a half mile of continuous river channel. Completion of this phase is expected in summer 2007. Future phases in 2007 through 2011 will backfill an additional 12.5 miles of canal and reconnect additional river channel. Two water control structures will be removed, restoring more than 8,000 acres of the river/floodplain ecosystem. The system will continue to be monitored for 5 years upon the end of construction to ensure restoration success.

### ***Louisiana Recovery Authority Board to Meet April 19***

Task Forces on environment, community planning to meet next week as well

BATON ROUGE - The Louisiana Recovery Authority Board and several task forces working on the recovery will meet next week in Baton Rouge.

- On Monday, April 17, the LRA Audit Committee will meet from 9-11 a.m. in the Oliver Pollock Room of the Galvez Conference Center located at 602 N. Fifth Street in Baton Rouge.
- On Monday, April 17, the Long-Term Community Planning Task Force will meet at SGS Petroleum Services, located at 803 Main Street in Baton Rouge. The meeting will begin at 1 p.m.
- On Wednesday, April 19, the LRA Board will hold its regular meeting on the campus of Baton Rouge Community College. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. in the [Louisiana Board Room of the Louisiana Building](#).
- On Thursday April 20, the Environmental Task Force will meet at the headquarters of the Department of Environmental Quality, Room 1051 of the Galvez Building in Baton Rouge from 1-3 p.m.

Meeting agendas will be posted on the LRA Web site ([www.lra.louisiana.gov](http://www.lra.louisiana.gov)) as soon as they are available. Meetings are open to the public. The Health Care Redesign Workgroup meeting originally scheduled for Monday, April 17, 2006 has been cancelled. For a full listing of upcoming events, please visit our [Web site](#).

### ***South of New Orleans, a People Fight to Keep Their Land***

April 13, 2006 — By Cain Burdeau, Associated Press

Venice, La. — Way beyond the jazz halls of New Orleans, the hardworking fishermen and oil workers on the sparsely populated banks of the Mississippi River are wondering why the federal government is talking about surrendering their land to Mother Nature. Federal officials announced Wednesday that they intend to protect all of hurricane-swamped southeastern Louisiana except, perhaps, a strip of land south of New Orleans known as lower Plaquemines Parish. "We're part of America, too," grumbled Morris Hartt, a 51-year-old gas station owner who runs one of the only places open in Venice, the last town on the highway south of New Orleans before Louisiana's marshes merge with the Gulf of Mexico.

The government's announcement has sent shock waves through the communities of fishermen, orange growers, sulfur miners and oil field workers. The fear is that if the government decides not to spend about \$1.6 billion to strengthen and heighten the levees down here, it may be impossible for folks to get flood insurance. Donald Powell, the White House's point man for the Gulf Coast recovery, said officials will study the feasibility of building up the levees in lower Plaquemines and issue a report by June. Among other things, the government is not sure whether it is worthwhile to spend so much money to protect 14,000 people, or only 2 percent of the population of metropolitan New Orleans.

"We have sacrificed a great deal for this nation, and now to turn their back on us and cut us off would be un-American," said Benny Rousselle, the parish president. "We're fighting for our survival." Gov. Kathleen Blanco said lower Plaquemines "has to stay in the mix." One solution, she said, would be to take 50 percent of the royalties the federal government gets from offshore oil and natural gas leases in the Gulf and spend it on protecting low-lying places like Venice from hurricanes. For years, Louisiana politicians have made that argument without success. People here are still working to reconstitute the lives they had before Katrina pushed water over their roofs. Utility crews are rewiring the parish, dump trucks are picking up piles of debris and earth-moving machinery patches levees. Many of the homes that were not knocked over by Katrina are shells with no sign of life. Crumpled schools, stores, marinas and churches dot the landscape. Uprooted and unclaimed coffins still lie in front of cemeteries.

Folks here argue the government should invest in building up the levees because lower Plaquemines plays a big role in providing the nation with oil and seafood. "If they're going to do this after the trillions of dollars of natural resources they've been taking out of our parish, then maybe we should look into the legal possibility of seceding, and then apply for foreign aid," said Barney Schoenberger, an 80-year-old former sheriff, tax assessor and state representative from lower Plaquemines. He added: "I'm not entirely serious. Tongue-in-cheek. But let's understand the analogy of it." Read the [full story](#).

## ***Mississippi: Building Back Better Than Ever***

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, one of the largest and most violent storms ever recorded, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium recognizes the importance of connecting local residents' hopes and visions for their future with the best ideas from the public and private sectors. "After Katrina: Building Back Better Than Ever," a report to Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour from the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal is one of the first steps in making that connection. This 178-page volume focuses on giving local leaders access to ideas and information that will help them decide what their region will look like five, ten, even twenty or thirty years from now. Comprehensive and far-reaching, the report addresses the issues of infrastructure, finance, economic development, and public service while emphasizing that it will be up to local decision makers to decide what ideas to implement. The report also contains a table enumerating every recommendation, resources to be tapped, and individuals or organizations to be held responsible for achieving the goal. This publication is available at: <http://www.governorscommission.com/>

## ***Grand Bay NERR Education Coordinator Named 2005 Outstanding Educator***

The Southern Association of Marine Educators (SAME) has named Jennifer Buchanan, education coordinator at the Grand Bay NERR, Outstanding Educator of the Year for 2005. Buchanan has worked as a coastal ecologist for more than 22 years and has devoted the last half of her career to marine/estuarine education along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, teaching the community about the value of

our coastal resources. "Jennifer has been involved with the reserve since its beginning and is very passionate about educating young and old alike about the wonders of nature and our coastal wetlands," said Grand Bay NERR Manager David Ruple. SAME is made up of marine educators from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and northwest Florida. For more information, contact [George Cathcart](#).

## ***Texas Coastal Forecast Offers Few Excuses for Not Catching Fish***

AUSTIN, Texas — Coastal fisheries biologists say conditions are looking good for coastal anglers looking to hook their limit of red drum, black drum, spotted sea trout, and even an exotic visitor to coastal waters, the mangrove snapper. A recent analysis of fish sampling data and fishing activity shows the number of hours that anglers spent fishing in 2004-2005 dropped slightly from the prior year along the Texas coast, but despite the drop in effort, coast-wide landings increased 2 percent to 1.5 million fish and catch rates were up 3 percent.

"Our fishing forecast is for another outstanding year," said Larry McKinney, Ph.D., in a briefing to Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission on April 6. "There is no excuse. The fish are there and if folks go down to the coast to catch them, they should have good luck." McKinney based that projection on data received from recent angler and gill net surveys. Catch rates for red drum, statistics show, remain at a 10-year record high. Based on last fall's and this spring's gill net surveys, the number of 20-to-24-inch red drum are "abundant" coastwide. He also reported that record numbers of red drum (redfish) are being caught in all bay systems, from Sabine Lake to Lower Laguna Madre and Baffin Bay. McKinney said that gill net catch rates for red drum in 2005 doubled that of 2004. 2006 gill net surveys also showed an abundance of 19-to-30-inch spotted sea trout up and down the coast, continuing an upward trend noted from 2004 to 2005. Coastwide, there was a one percent increase in landings with 646,000-plus spotted sea trout caught. Southern flounder, on the other hand, remain a concern coastwide, according to McKinney. Nonetheless, he pointed out that 2006 gill net surveys show above average numbers of 14-to-20-inch flounder.

In addition, catch rates (the number of fish caught per hour of effort) for all species combined increased by 3 percent from .279 fish per hour in 2003-04 to .288 fish per hour in 2004-05. McKinney told the commission that the Texas coastal fishing outlook projects that spotted sea trout and red drum numbers in all bays will equal or exceed long-term averages, promising another great year. Galveston Bay, for example, should be an excellent fishery, especially since there was no hard winter, thus increasing forage fish already available in good numbers. More temperate winter weather also has resulted in an increase in the numbers of mangrove snapper that are migrating along the Texas coast, as far north as San Antonio Bay, presenting improved fishing opportunities for those without access to a boat. "It's a great resource for youth because mangrove snapper can be caught from a pier and put up a good fight," McKinney said.

The fishing forecast for the Coastal Bend calls for fewer, but bigger, sea trout in Aransas Bay and catch rates for red drum continuing at a six-year high in Corpus Christi Bay. Statistics show that sheephead levels have increased in Corpus Christi Bay three-fold since the 1980s. In Upper Laguna Madre and Baffin Bay, black drum are "all over the place," McKinney said. On a less positive note, marine biologists in the Lower Laguna Madre report that brown tide is still present, but is diminishing in some areas. However, brown tide is having little impact on sportfish populations, with natural baits proving more effective in hooking fish at present.

Questioned about the state of freshwater inflows coming down rivers into estuaries, McKinney expressed concern about inflows into all the bay systems due to the state's continued population boom and increased demands for water. Nonetheless, the coastal fisheries leader said, now is the "best shot I've ever seen" at finding solutions to the freshwater inflow dilemma. McKinney also informed the commission that new

seagrass rules take effect May 1 and reported on the crab trap removal program. Despite inclement weather, volunteers recently removed 1,339 crab traps from coastal waters. Since 2002, he reported that more than 1,600 volunteers have removed 19,347 crab traps. On the net:  
<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/habitats/bays/ecosystemmap.phtml>

## Other News

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### ***Powell, FEMA Release New Orleans Advisory Flood Data***

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Revises Cost Estimates for Levees

NEW ORLEANS, April 12, 2006-- Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding Donald Powell, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Commander Lt. Gen. Carl Strock, FEMA Director of Mitigation and Administrator of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) David Maurstad, and FEMA Deputy Director for Gulf Coast Recovery Gil Jamieson today announced the release of advisory flood data for New Orleans and the majority of the surrounding area. The flood advisories will inform residents how to reduce or mitigate flood risks as they begin reconstruction, and will provide guidance to communities for better and stronger rebuilding. They also announced the release of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers revised estimates of costs to certify and further enhance the area's levees. Powell announced that the Administration plans to begin working with Congress immediately to address additional funding beyond what the Administration has already requested, estimated at \$2.5 billion, for work in all of the New Orleans area except for lower Plaquemines.

The flood advisories, formally known as advisory base flood elevations or ABFEs, estimate the flooding risk to the New Orleans area and inform residents and local officials about how to reduce or mitigate those risks. The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) has stated that in order for residents to be eligible for its State Homeowner Assistance plan, all reconstruction work must meet or exceed the latest available FEMA advisory base flood elevations and meet the legal requirements of the State Uniform Construction Code. FEMA has previously stated that these advisories must be used for any rebuilding projects using certain FEMA grant dollars thus the advisories apply to both public infrastructure projects as well as mitigation grants. More details about the flood advisories can be found at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).

Today's commitment by the Administration to work with Congress to request authorization and funds for this work allows FEMA to release the advisories, which recognizes the eventual protection that will be achieved once the Corps' work is completed. Later this year, FEMA will begin its formal regulatory process, which ultimately ends in the release of final and binding flood maps that reflect 100-year protection.

According to today's Corps estimates, the total additional cost beyond what the Administration has already requested to certify and enhance the entire New Orleans levee system by replacing I-walls with T-walls and raising the levees to provide 100-year protection would now be \$4.1 billion. The Corps' preliminary cost estimate, released last month, was \$5.9 billion for this work. This kind of cost projection typically takes several years of analysis and refinement, and in this case, the effort has been significantly accelerated. Once completed, all the improvements will provide a hurricane protection system for New Orleans that is significantly better and stronger than ever before. Information on the Corps' work that would be performed with the \$1.46 billion request in the pending supplemental can be found at: <http://www.usace.army.mil/hurricane.html>.

The Office of the Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding coordinates the long-term Federal rebuilding efforts by working with state and local officials to focus on a set of prioritized, integrated and long-term initiatives to rebuild the region such as restoring long-term safety and security, renewing economic activity, and revitalizing communities. [www.dhs.gov/officeforgulfcoastrebuilding](http://www.dhs.gov/officeforgulfcoastrebuilding). Read the full news release at <http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/releases/neworleanslevees.htm>.

## ***FEMA: Ready for 2006 Hurricane Season***

Release Date: April 12, 2006

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's response to the unprecedented Gulf Coast hurricanes - Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma - was the largest mobilization of emergency response and disaster recovery resources in the history of FEMA - exceeding operational responses to the 2004 Florida hurricanes, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the Great Midwest Floods of 1993. FEMA approaches the 2006 hurricane season with a renewed sense of commitment, improvement and urgency, building on a solid foundation of experienced professionals and the lessons learned from last year's unprecedented disaster response activities. The 2005 hurricane season tested our nation as never before, and we are committed to increasing our preparedness for catastrophic events and smaller-scale disasters.

While states and localities have the lead in emergency response, FEMA will be prepared to coordinate the federal government's supporting role. FEMA also understands the special needs of Gulf Coast states, which will include a need for assistance with evacuation planning, difficulties with manufactured housing, and diminished law enforcement capabilities. FEMA is implementing multiple new measures designed to strengthen essential functions so the agency can more effectively respond to all disasters. These improvements include building a 21st century supply tracking system, enhancing our ability to receive requests for individual assistance, expediting the pace of debris removal, and developing an smarter plan for long-term housing.

The [web site](#) provides examples of some of the improvements that will be in place for the 2006 hurricane season. Chief among them is completing the integration of FEMA operations with the Department of Homeland Security. FEMA will continue to make other significant enhancements beyond this hurricane season.

## ***FCC Rejects Call to Halt Telecom Towers for Birds***

April 13, 2006 — By Reuters

WASHINGTON — The Federal Communications Commission Wednesday dismissed a request from environmental groups to halt construction of communications towers in the Gulf Coast region until steps are taken to protect millions of migratory birds. In its decision, the FCC said a moratorium would hinder the availability of commercial and public safety communications in the region, still reeling from last year's devastating hurricane. The agency, which licenses the building and operations of communications towers, also said the environmental groups did not provide a legal justification for their request. However, the FCC said it will revisit the issue soon to examine the effects of the towers on migratory birds.

The Forest Conservation Council, the American Bird Conservancy and Friends of the Earth filed a petition in August 2002, arguing that the construction of towers in the Gulf region violated federal environmental laws and posed a danger to migratory birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that as many as 5 million migratory birds are killed each year at communications towers in the United States, including some birds that are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

George Fenwick, president of the American Bird Conservancy, said adoption of simple measures, such as changing aviation safety lights on towers, could significantly reduce bird kills. "The lights ... interfere with the birds' celestial navigation cues. Confused, the birds fly around the towers repeatedly, crashing into one another, the tower, its guy wires, or the ground. Others simply drop from exhaustion," Fenwick said in a statement before the FCC decision was announced. A wireless telecommunications industry group, PCIA, said it was encouraged by the FCC decision. "There is no clear evidence that telecommunications towers pose a real threat to migratory birds," PCIA President Michael Fitch said in a statement. "It is reassuring that the commission refused to act on the basis of an inconclusive record before it."

## Training and Conferences

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### ***Envisioning the Future of the Gulf Coast***

Using Engineering and Science to Protect Communities, the Economy and the Ecosystem

**Where & When:** April 25-27, 2006, New Orleans (for policy leaders) and April 24-28, New Orleans (for scientists and engineers)

A Symposium for Action Sponsored by BP in Cooperation with America's WETLAND in Partnership with the States of Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas

BP in cooperation with America's WETLAND will sponsor a symposium in New Orleans in April 2006 in partnership with the states of Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas.

Symposium Purpose and Objectives -- The goal of the symposium is to shape a collective, national call to action to protect coastal resources along the Gulf of Mexico and to identify technically sound options for protecting and restoring these resources.

**Who is invited:** A diverse group of opinion and policy leaders and scientists from key non-governmental organizations, government entities, academic and research institutions, and industry will be invited to participate in policy segments of the symposium. An international group of 40 scientists and engineers will develop a series of plan options for the coast.

The symposium will have two components providing for detailed discussion of both technical and policy issues -- recognizing that it takes both motivation and a viable solution to ensure the success of the Gulf coast. The policy group and the technical groups will come together to learn from each other about the need for action and potential solutions. For more information visit: <http://www.futureofthegulfcoast.org/>.

### ***Pearl River Basin Symposium***

The 2006 Pearl River Basin Symposium is scheduled for May 5-6 at the Museum of Natural Science in Jackson. Featured speakers are Donna Yowell, Mississippi Urban Forestry Council, and wildlife photographer and author Stephen Kirkpatrick. Each day's activities will include break-out sessions on: Growth Readiness; Habitat & Wildlife; Industry & Economics; Watershed Management (moderated by MDEQ's Janet Chapman); and Community Interests.



Symposium supporters include: MS Museum of Natural Science; Entergy; MS Farm Bureau; the Pearl River Basin Development District; the Upper Pearl River Watershed Advisory Group; the Pearl River Basin Coalition; The Nature Conservancy; MDEQ; and the MS Wildlife Federation. Admission is \$15 Friday and \$10 Saturday. This includes admission to the museum and symposium, refreshments throughout the day, lunch, and access to special exhibits. For more information, contact Amy Kyle (The Nature Conservancy) at (504) 831-9689 or visit [www.mswildlife.org](http://www.mswildlife.org).

## **2006 National Main Streets Conference**

**June 4-7 New Orleans**

The National Main Streets Conference is the premiere conference on preservation-based commercial district revitalization. People from small and rural towns, suburban communities, large and mid-sized cities, and urban neighborhood business districts can all benefit from the ideas, solutions, issue-exploration, and networking opportunities that only we offer.

Join us as we showcase the dynamic projects, activities, and strategies communities are using to revitalize their commercial districts. Educational sessions and field trips will cover many revitalization concepts in addition to focusing special attention on ways to leverage your local cultural and heritage resources to create an economic development edge and a sense of identity.

The conference features more than 50 educational sessions to explore and teach proven revitalization practices:

- Resources for services, products, and information at the Main Street Expo, featuring for- and non-profit entities.
- An opportunity to share experiences with peers, discuss strategies one-on-one, and learn from others.
- Access to commercial district revitalization experts through panels, workshops, educational sessions, and more.
- Field sessions and tours that will give you an up-close look at revitalization and preservation projects.
- An opportunity to meet colleagues engaging in innovative projects and experiencing similar challenges and return home feeling energized with exciting, new ideas!

Visit the conference [website](#) for more information.

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to [Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov](mailto:Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov)